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***Exploring Informality in Chinese Urbanization:  
A Case Study of Tiantongyuan  
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SUMMARY, METHODS, and CONCLUSION

China's rapid urbanization has heightened activity in the informal economy, that segment of the economy where enterprises operate outside the reach of government regulation. This project explores the operation of economic informality in housing, land use, and transportation in Tiantongyuan, an extensive residential settlement on northern Beijing's urban fringe. Tiantongyuan, whose total population is estimated at 350,000, houses a large share of Beijing's rural migrant workers.

Field observation was used to examine how residents of Tiantongyuan and its urban villages live, work, and travel around. Informal focus group discussions were held to lay groundwork for subsequent interviews of 20 individuals concerning their histories and daily lives. The interviews were conducted in November and December, 2010. Some participants granted permission to shadow their daily commutes between home and work, and to visit their housing.

This study relied upon snowball sampling and recruitment of public passersby. Three urban planning students from Renmin University were trained as research assistants to aid especially with interviewing.

This exploration of Tiantongyuan reveals many areas of interest for potential further study; however, the primary purpose of this research is to identify areas for increasing the economic opportunities of immigrants in order to address rural poverty in China. The following recommendations are for areas of further study or potential policy that can lead improving the economic opportunities and livelihoods of migrant workers in Tiantongyuan.

- Legalizing street vending and protecting street vendors from the street police.
- Legalizing black cabs.
- Creating formal affordable housing for migrant workers.

Although informal enterprise is officially criticized and black market activity specifically is prohibited, my analysis indicates that informality may provide benefits for both Tiantongyuan natives and migrant workers. Informality helps meet market demands for commercial space, affordable housing and transportation. Informality

improves access to work and affordable housing, ultimately mitigating the larger problem of rural poverty.